MEDWAY COUNCIL HOMELESSNESS REVIEW

June 2024

Medway Council
Serving You

1. Introduction

1.1 Medway Council is required to carry out a Homelessness Review by the Homelessness Act 2002. This review must cover:

- The current and future levels of homelessness in Medway
- The provision of services to prevent homelessness, provide accommodation for homeless households and support those at risk of homelessness including repeat homelessness.
- The resources being made available by Medway Council and the wide range of partners in Medway.

1.2 The review will inform Medway's Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Strategy by identifying key issues and any gaps in service. The review uses data from the council's own records on homelessness, the National Office for Statistics as well as information gathered from other local services.

1.3 The review will be published on the council's website and drawn to the attention of our partners in the Homelessness Forum. We have, and will continue to seek, partner organisations' comments via engagement events such as the work already completed with the Arts and Homelessness International Theatre project, the Homelessness Forum, the Rough Sleeping forum and their subsequent task and finish groups to ensure we get meaningful participation.

1.4 The review describes types of homelessness, the current legislation and policy context. It highlights the impacts of demographic change, the economy and the housing market on homelessness. It considers the data for statutory homelessness, the use of temporary accommodation, rough sleeping and sofa surfing. It profiles the households that become homeless in Medway and their vulnerabilities.

1.5 It moves on to consider the current provision of services, accommodation and support provided by Medway Council and partner organisations, barriers faced by Medway Council and partner organisations, and suggests some objectives and actions to be included in the subsequent Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Strategy.

1.6 When considering the subject of homelessness, people who rough sleep are the most visible, but the reality in Medway is that rough sleepers make up a small minority of homeless households. Households are considered homeless if they do not have accommodation that they have a legal right to occupy which is accessible to them and in which it is reasonable for them to continue to live. This can include households becoming homeless if they are being legally or illegally evicted, if they are required to leave by others in the household, or if they can't use their home due to disability or are fleeing domestic violence or other violence, or other reasons for homelessness. Homelessness also includes the 'hidden' homeless, including people who are sofa surfing or sleeping in vehicles.

1.7 It could be argued that homelessness or risk of homelessness is a symptom of a wide and complex web of interacting factors. Individual factors including mental and physical ill health, additional support needs and substance misuse can play a part in the causes of homelessness, and there are several financial impacts that exacerbate the situation. These can include the high cost of renting or buying a home, the benefit cap and disparity between the local housing allowance and price of market rent. In more recent years, the ongoing impacts of the COVID19 Pandemic, as well as the cost-of-living crisis have had a significant impact on the ability to access and affordability of maintaining accommodation in the UK.

2. Social Policy and Context of Homelessness

2.1 Since our review in December 2018, there have been a number of significant legislative changes. Although the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017[1] had been enacted at the time of the previous review, we are now 5 years into working practically with the new legislation. The introduction of prevention and relief duties, as well as public bodies having a duty to refer to homelessness services has seen a change in how the Council handles Homelessness applications. In turn, the Housing Options team has seen a significant increase in the number of positive outcomes for those making a homelessness application to Medway Council since 2018. Further detail of these outcomes and changes will be discussed in section 4 of this review.

2.2 In August 2018, the government published its Rough Sleeping Strategy setting out its vision for halving rough sleeping by 2022 and ending it by 2027. This strategy was withdrawn in 2022 and they have now issued a new policy paper called Ending Rough Sleeping for Good.
https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ending-rough-sleeping-for-good

2.3 In January 2024, a report was published for the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) called "Monetising the Social Benefits of Reducing Rough Sleeping"[2]. The report highlights the savings that can be made within local authorities when we work toward preventing rough sleeping. Alongside this, the report emphasises the negative impacts that rough sleeping can have on personal well-being.

2.4 Medway's Rough Sleeper Initiative (RSI) has been funded by DLUHC and Local Government to fund, commission and directly provide specific activities in Medway since July 2018. The effectiveness of this initiative is monitored closely by central government, and the council carries out monthly rough sleeper estimates, and bimonthly rough sleeper counts to track the numbers of rough sleepers in Medway. Activities that are monitored are:

- A Rough Sleeper Co-ordinator
- Personal budgets to allow a rough sleeper to gain accommodation.
- An assertive outreach service.
- A Housing First service.
- Rough Sleeping Navigators to provide ongoing support
- A Senior Resettlement Officer and Resettlement Apprentice.
- An arts project for people who sleep rough
- Temporary emergency accommodation provision.
- Enhanced hostel provision
- Off the street assessment centre

2.5 The Domestic Abuse Act 2021[3] created additional requirements for Local Authorities when approached by people who are homeless because of domestic abuse. This included how the homelessness application is assessed, meaning all people who are homeless as a result of Domestic Abuse are in priority need. The Local Authority must also meet specific

[1] https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2017/13/contents
[2] https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/65a7f78094c997000daeb94b/Monetising_the_social_benefits_of_reducing_rough_sleeping_Jan_2024.pdf
[3] https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2021/17/contents/enacted

requirements when sourcing temporary accommodation for those fleeing domestic abuse and provide support for those who are fleeing domestic abuse. The act has facilitated better partnerships between Medway's Housing Services and Domestic Abuse Services, resulting in a better experience for those who make a homelessness application as a result of experiencing domestic abuse.

2.6 In August 2023, the Supported Housing (Regulatory Oversight) Act[4] was passed. This Act aims to improve the standards of supported housing across the sector and imposes new licencing regulations for providers of supported accommodation. Ahead of this act, Medway Council has established a dedicated team for improving the standards of supported accommodation locally. It is expected that an increase in quality of supported housing will assist in reducing the amount of people who are made homeless, as well as providing better options for those who are homeless and need additional support. This is because supported housing schemes will be better equipped to support those with additional needs to maintain long term tenancies once they have moved on from the service and reduce their reliance on other support services.

2.7 At the time of this review, the Renters (Reform) Bill (2022/23)[5] is still undergoing its journey through parliament. The purpose of the bill is to increase the security of private rented tenants. In Medway, one of the most common reasons for homelessness is eviction from private rented accommodation. Therefore, should this bill make it through parliament and into law, the Council could see a shift in the reason people are approaching for assistance, and potentially the ways in which we are able to help or advise.

2.8 It is important that the council's plans and strategies support each other. The Council Plan 2023/24[6] states that one of Medway's key priorities is Preventing Homelessness. It describes this outcome as:

- To prevent homelessness through a council-wide approach
- To continue to deliver the priorities of the rough sleeper initiative.
- To work in partnership to support residents to access the right support and housing options.

The Council Plan Measures of success:

1. *Number of households living in temporary accommodation*
2. *Number of households with dependent children in bed and breakfast (B&B) accommodation who have resided there for 6+ weeks.*
3. *Number of private sector properties improved as a result of the council's intervention.*

2.9 The Housing Strategy to 2030[7] has identified four key priorities:

- ***Supply*** *– increase affordable housing supply.*
- ***Quality*** *– Driving up housing standards.*
- ***Participation*** *– involving Medway Housing Tenants and other residents so they have a say.*
- ***Independence*** *– helping people to stay living in their own homes.*

[4] https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2023/26/enacted/data.html
[5] https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3462
[6] https://www.medway.gov.uk/info/200387/council_plan#place
[7] https://democracy.medway.gov.uk/mgconvert2pdf.aspx?id=72575

2.10 These priorities will influence the actions taken by Medway Council when looking to tackle homelessness in the borough, whilst simultaneously making the prevention of homelessness more achievable.

2.11 Medway Council's Joint Local Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2024 to 2028[8] identifies a number of ways in which good quality and affordable housing is a building block to achieving better health and wellbeing for Medway residents, and there are several overlaps within the JLHW strategy, the housing strategy and the homelessness prevention and rough sleeping strategy.

3. Housing Health and Homelessness

3.1 Housing provides more than shelter and access to cooking and personal hygiene facilities. It can also provide a space to rest and relax in safety. When a household is homeless, they lack these benefits. A household in temporary accommodation or a hostel can feel insecure and socially isolated whilst learning about their new neighbourhood. Someone sleeping rough also lacks basic shelter and the safety and warmth a home provides.

3.2 However, providing a home to someone does not always alleviate all support needs someone may have. To tackle this, Medway Council Housing recognises the importance of working with other partners, as well as the importance of joint working with internal teams such as Social Services, Public Health, and the NHS.

3.3 In 2021, The National Office for Statistics released a report on deaths of Homeless people[9]. The report clearly highlights the impact of co-occurring conditions, multiple disadvantages and homelessness, as well as showing that the South East had the 3rd highest rate of deaths amongst people who are homeless in 2021.

3.4 The Medway Multi Disadvantage Network (MMDN) was formed in 2023 to ensure that people facing multiple disadvantages have equitable access to services, to prevent premature mortality and to increase opportunities for success in achieving healthy and fulfilled lives.

3.5 MMDN's mission is to take the lead locally in ensuring those services working in collective partnership, are transparent in both our successes and challenges faced. We use our collective powers, resources and knowledge to flex and change systems to create opportunities for success for all.

3.6 Medway Council has joined the MEAM (Making Every Adult Matter)[10] partnership. MEAM supports local areas across the country to transform services and systems and to directly improve the lives of people facing multiple disadvantages. In late 2023, two MEAM coordinators were employed by Medway Council and have a small caseload of those identified in Medway who have been highlighted at the highest risk of premature death

[8] https://www.medway.gov.uk/downloads/file/3710/joint_local_health_and_wellbeing_strategy_2024_to_2028

[9] https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/bulletins/deathsofhomelesspeopleinenglandandwales/2021registrations

[10] https://meam.org.uk/

due to multiple disadvantages.

3.7 The Integrated Care Board (ICB) are currently funding a team of nurses that work with Rough Sleepers in the community[11]. This is a widely, and well used service in Medway as it enables rough sleepers the flexibility of accessing physical health care without the need for an appointment.

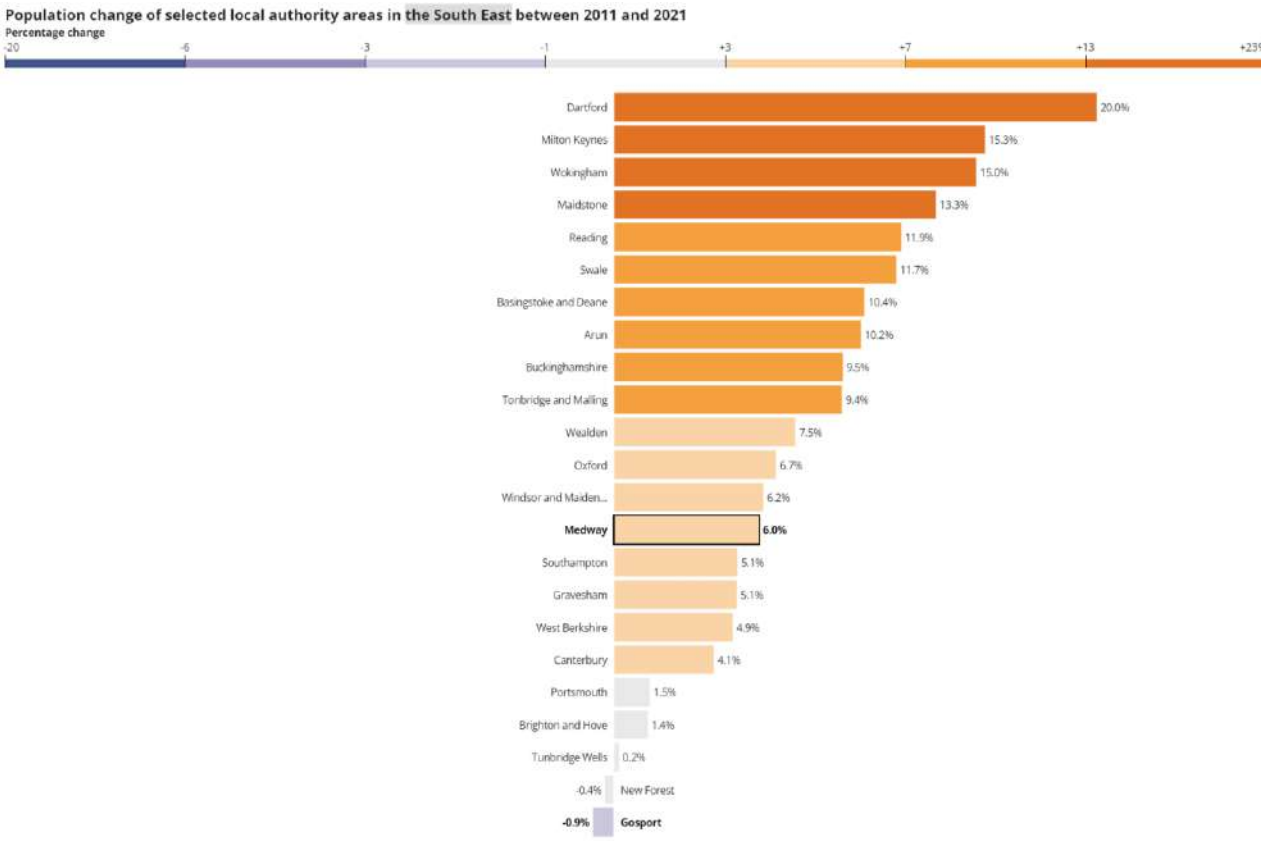
3.8 The ICB employs a Rough Sleeper Mental Health Practitioner, which aims to assist rough sleepers into local mental health services. The role covers both Kent and Medway. This practitioner has been a key role in opening doors for those who are experiencing rough sleeping access mental health services in Medway, and who may be unable to follow the traditional referral routes into services.

3.9 It is important that Housing maintain good contacts within the health and social care sectors, therefore attending panels such at the MMDN meeting and Vulnerability panels are examples of where these relationships can be maintained. Multidisciplinary resources such as these that ensure those who are in need can access the correct resources. Professionals can refer into the panels and present the concerns they have for a Medway Resident.

4. Availability and Condition of Accommodation in Medway

4.1 Growth in the number of people and households drives the demand for housing in both the private and social sector. The National Office for Statistics has found that “In Medway, the population size has increased by 6.0%, from around 263,900 in 2011 to 279,800 in 2021.” It is also important to note the population growth in boroughs surrounding Medway, as growth in other boroughs could impact who moves into the Medway area. [12]

[11] https://www.kentcht.nhs.uk/service/rough-sleeper-service/
[12] https://www.ons.gov.uk/visualisations/censuspopulationchange/E06000035/



4.2 The NOMIS data[13] for July 2022 – June 2023 reflects the previous review in that although 81.4% of Medway's population is economically active which is slightly higher than the Southeast average, the average weekly pay for full time workers living in Medway is £683.40 compared to £725.50 on average across the Southeast. Conversely, Medway reports 3.5% of its population to be unemployed in comparison to 3.4% on average in the South East.

4.3 If we take a closer look below at the economic inactivity in Medway, a large proportion of these people are not able to secure work which will have a long-standing impact on their

Economic inactivity (Jul 2022-Jun 2023)

	Medway (Level)	Medway (%)	South East (%)	Great Britain (%)
All People				
Total	33,300	18.6	18.8	21.4
Student	6,600	19.9	27.0	26.7
Looking After Family/Home	10,500	31.4	19.8	19.5
Temporary Sick	!	!	2.0	2.3
Long-Term Sick	9,100	27.2	22.9	26.6
Discouraged	!	!	#	0.3
Retired	3,500	10.6	15.6	13.1
Other	#	#	12.6	11.6
Wants A Job	12,600	37.8	19.0	17.6
Does Not Want A Job	20,700	62.2	81.0	82.4

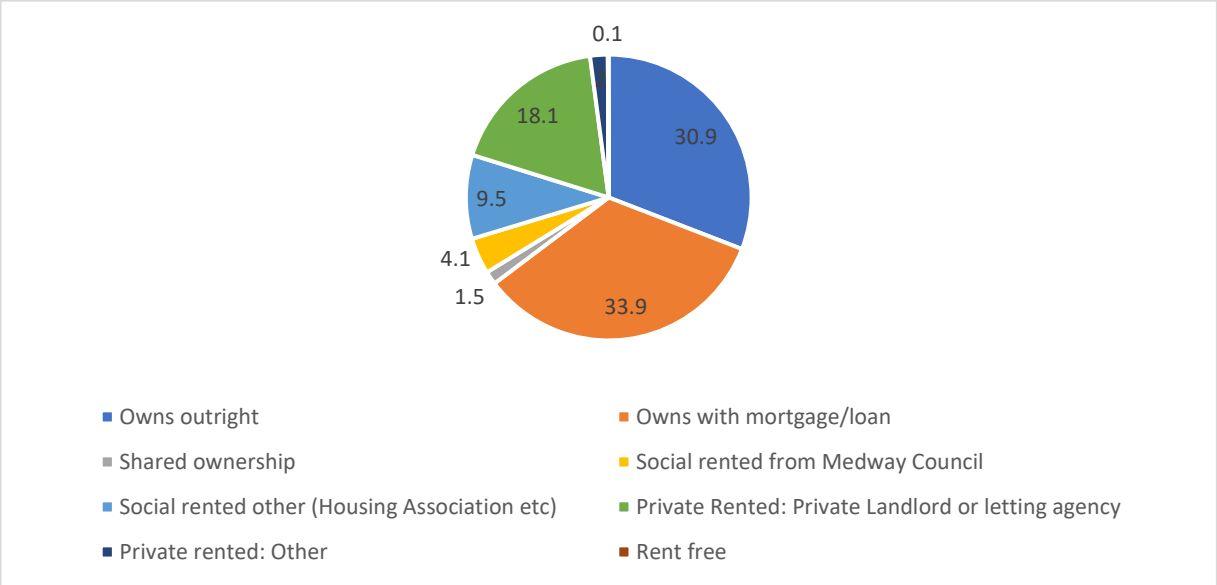
Source: ONS annual population survey
Sample size too small for reliable estimate (see definitions)
! Estimate is not available since sample size is disclosive (see definitions)
Notes: numbers are for those aged 16-64.
% is a proportion of those economically inactive, except total, which is a proportion of those aged 16-64

[13] https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/reports/lmp/la/1946157282/report.aspx#tabrespop

ability to afford accommodation in the area. This puts them at higher risk of homelessness and poverty if the cost of home ownership or renting privately continues to increase.

4.4 The cost to rent, or buy, a home in Medway remains lower than London and some households move to Medway and commute to London. The cost for renting and buying is also a little lower than in some neighbouring local authorities and this can draw households to live in Medway. Some London and neighbouring Housing Authorities place households in Temporary Accommodation in Medway , which is discussed later in this review.

4.5 Data from the 2021 Census[14] shows that Medway has a high level of home ownership in comparison to other tenures:

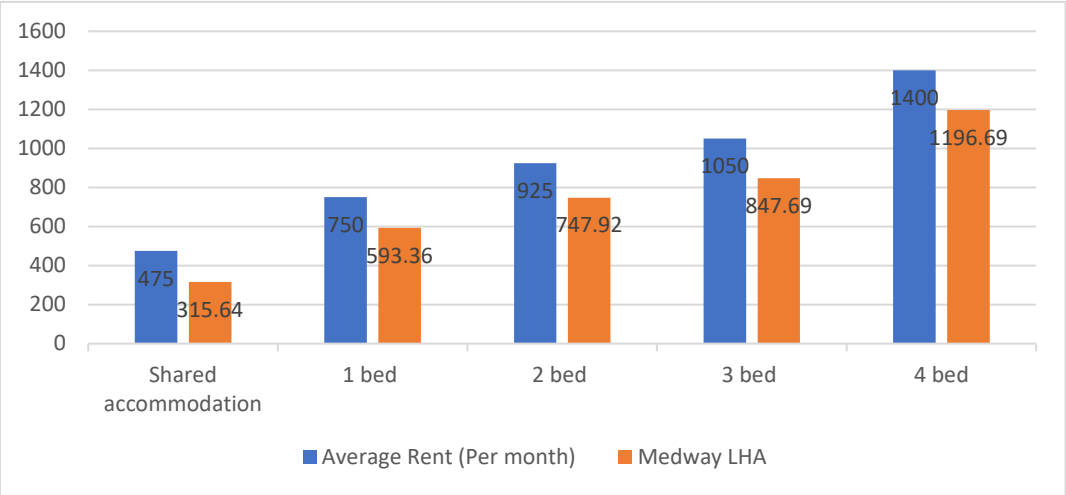


4.6 Ownership with a mortgage has reduced 4.9 percentage points (pp) since the last census in 2011, whilst ownership outright has increased by 2pp. Those privately renting has increased by 2.5pp since 2011. This is likely a reflection of the increase in cost of property ownership along with an aging demographic amongst homeowners.

4.7 The local housing allowance (LHA) is the amount of money someone can claim toward their rent. It is based on the bedroom need of the household. There is a maximum amount of LHA that can be claimed and is means tested. The LHA is usually paid as part of someone's Universal Credit claim. Due to the increase in private rents, there is often a disparity between the amount of housing element someone may be entitled to claim and the cost of their rent. The shortfall of rent is expected to be made up by a person's other income.

[14] https://www.ons.gov.uk/census/maps/change/housing/tenure-of-household/hh-tenure-9a/private-rented-private-landlord-or-letting-agency?lad=E06000035

4.8 The below chart shows the relationship between the current maximum LHA rates in Medway and the average cost of rent in Medway according to the National Office for Statistics[15].



4.9 The annual target for Affordable Housing completions is 204 and this includes Affordable/Social rented and intermediate affordable housing including Shared Ownership and discounted market sale homes through the 'First Homes' scheme. As part of its Enabling function, the Council works closely with Developers and Registered Providers to ensure the right type of affordable housing is delivered to meet the needs of Medway residents. For example, when agreeing the size mix to be provided on a new site, the needs of households on the Housing Register are considered. We also seek to maximise affordable housing delivery where there is an opportunity for additional affordable homes to be delivered over and above the minimum planning requirement by providing commuted sums funding where possible.

4.10 There was a decline in the number of Affordable Housing units delivered between 2020/21 and 2022/23, this was mainly due to the Pandemic and the impact it had on the housing development sector. Development sites under construction were delayed during the Pandemic and were also affected by significant cost increases for building materials, along with a lack of labour in the construction industry. Many of the Affordable Housing units anticipated for delivery during this time were not completed until 2023/24.

Year	Affordable Homes Completed	Private and Affordable Homes Combined	Percentage of Affordable Housing as percentage of total
2018/19	181	876	21%
2019/20	333	1,555	21.5%
2020/21	216	1,330	16%
2021/22	192	1,342	14.5%
2022/23	172	1,122	15.5%

[15] https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/housing/bulletins/privaterentalmarketsummarystatisticsinengland/latest#rent-prices-by-region

2018/19 – 2022/23	**1,094**	**6,225**	**17.5%**

4.11 The Council's own HRA Development Strategy aims to increase the Council's affordable housing stock by 1% year on year through a combination of new build developments and acquisitions. The below table shows the homes delivered so far and those in the pipeline:

4.12

HRA Developments Completed to Date		
Phases & Sites	Year Completed	Number of Homes
Phase 1 – multiple sites	2015/16	24
Phase 2 – Centenary Gardens	2016/17	32
Phase 3 – Petham Green	2019/20	6
Ingram Court	2021/22	17
Borough Road	2022/23	7
Phase 4 – Eastcourt/Lynsted/Woodchurch	2022/23	28
RSAP	2022/23	6
Copenhagen Road	2023/24	9
LAHF R2	2023/24	2
Longley Road	2024/25	9
HRA Development Pipeline		
LAHF R2	Due 2024/25	2
Phase 6 – Britton Farm	Due 2024/25	44
Solomans Road	Due 2024/25	14
Phase 5 – Aburound House/Lennox Wood	Due 2025/26	37
	TOTAL:	**237**

4.13 The Private Sector Housing Team (PSH) receive a high number of referrals into the service with requests to deal with disrepair of varying levels in the private sector. The table below considers the number of service requests received each year, and as with other data in this review, there has been an overall increase in requests for assistance to the council since the last review was completed.

4.14

Financial Year	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Number of enquiries	348	595	315	459	437	574

4.15 Significant disrepair within the private rented sector can cause additional barriers in preventing homelessness, as it could render a property completely unsuitable for a household to continue living there and reduces the number of properties available to accommodate households looking for somewhere else to live.

5. Homelessness Services and Partners in Medway

5.1 A wide range of statutory and voluntary sector organisations provide services to homeless people in Medway. Whilst this is not an exhaustive list, it provides a good insight to the assistance available to those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness in Medway.

Help and advice: What's available where and when?

Key: Toilets Food Showers Sanitary

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday	All week
Caring Hands: Breakfast: 9.30-11am Dinner: 12noon-1pm Showers: 9.30am-1pm Laundry and computer access: 9.30-1pm 1-2-1 Support: 1-4pm **Drop in for rough sleepers:** Held at Salvation Army, Green St, Gillingham, 6pm. 2 course meal **Gillingham Street Angels:** 43 Skinner St, Gillingham. 9am-1pm, food, clothing, bedding, support, wifi, referrals, clothes washing.	**Caring Hands:** Breakfast: 9.30-11am Dinner: 12noon-1pm Showers: 9.30am-1pm Laundry and computer access: 9.30-1pm 1-2-1 Support: 1-4pm **Domestic Abuse One Stop Shop:** Drop in service for anyone affected by domestic abuse. Sunlight Centre, 105 Richmond St, Gillingham. Drop in available 9.30am-12noon **Gillingham Street Angels:** 43 Skinner St, Gillingham. 9am-1pm, food, clothing, bedding, support, wifi, referrals, clothes washing. **Salvation Army:** Take away meal. Church St, Chatham, 01634 843689. 6pm Citizens Advice and NHS Health Bus available.	**Caring Hands:** Breakfast: 9.30-11am Dinner: 12noon-1pm Showers: 9.30am-1pm Laundry and computer access: 9.30-1pm 1-2-1 Support: 1-4pm **One2One Support:** Benefits advice, groceries, shower, English lessons.10am-1pm **Medway Street Angels: Soup Kitchen** Rhode Street car park, Chatham. Needle exch. 7pm. **Salvation Army:** Cafe, showers, groceries. Church St, Chatham, 10am-12noon. Citizens Advice and NHS Health Bus available.	**Caring Hands:** Breakfast: 9.30-11am Dinner: 12noon-1pm Showers: 9.30am-1pm 1-2-1 Support: 1-4pm **Medway Street Angels: Soup Kitchen** AMAT Hive, Chatham, 7pm **Gillingham Street Angels:** 43 Skinner St, Gillingham. 9am-1pm, food, clothing, bedding, support, wifi, referrals, clothes washing.	**Caring Hands:** Breakfast: 9.30-11am Dinner: 12noon-1pm Showers: 9.30am-1pm 1-2-1 Support: 1-4pm **Gillingham Street Angels, Soup Kitchen:** Green Street, Gillingham. 5pm **Gillingham Street Angels:** 43 Skinner St, Gillingham. 9am-1pm, food, clothing, bedding, support, wifi, referrals, clothes washing.	**Gillingham Street Angels:** 43 Skinner St, Gillingham. 9am-1pm, food, clothing, bedding, support, wifi, referrals, clothes washing. **Medway Street Angels: Soup Kitchen** Rhode Street car park, Chatham. Needle exch. 7pm.	**One Big Family: Soup Kitchen:** 6.30pm, at the bottom of Meeting House Lane, Chatham (near McDonalds), homecooked food, essentials, advice and signposting.	**AMAT Hive:** Supported housing for over 25-year-olds. 10 Chelmar Rd, Chatham 0800 698 1000. (Referrals Monday-Friday) 8.30am-12.30am **Smokefree Advice Centre:** Offers free face-to-face and digital support services to help residents quit smoking. The centre is based at Railway St, Chatham, with drop-in sessions at other venues. medway.gov.uk/stopsmoking or 01634 334800 **Sexual Health Services:** Clinics across Medway offering confidential screening and treatment for STIs, contraception, HIV treatment and care. Main hub at 4 Clover St, Chatham. 0300 1231678 open Mon-Thur 8am-8pm, Fri 8am-5pm, Sat 9am-12noon **Urgent Treatment Centre:** Medway Maritime Hospital, Gillingham - open 24/7 **Wellbeing Café:** Activities and support for people with low to moderate mental health needs. Accessed by registration appointments only. Tel: 01634 581511 or email info@sunlighttrust.org.uk. Friday 6-9pm; Saturday 3.30-6.30pm; Sunday 1-4pm. Sunlight Centre, 105 Richmond Road, Gillingham ME7 1LX **PTI Peer2Peer Project:** If you or someone you know has a drug or alcohol issue and is struggling to engage with drug and alcohol treatment services in Medway and you feel they would benefit from a Peer Mentor please call Samantha on 07808 321750. **Public Health Dental Care:** NHS dental care available to all, you do not have to give an address. Visit: medway.gov.uk/oralhealth **Homelessness Health Clinic:** Bookable health checks available at Boots, Pentagon Centre, Chatham. Every Friday, 10am-12noon. Drop in to book an appointment or visit: kmicb.homelessness@nhs.net **Oasis Domestic Abuse Service:** Helpline 0800 917 9948, 9.30-11.30am, except Bank Holidays. **Womens Aid:** 0808 2000247 **Mens Advice Line:** 0808 8010327

Monday to Friday

Citizens Advice Medway: Registered charity providing advice on housing, welfare benefits, employment, debt, family law and more. Kingsley House, 37-39 Balmoral Rd, Gillingham. 01634 383760, 9.30am-5pm.

MEGAN CIC: Mental health support & peer support groups. MVA building, 5a New Rd Avenue, Chatham 01634 402077, 8am-4pm Caring Hands: Day centre for the homeless and vulnerable. Bridge House, New Rd, Chatham. 01634 409768, 9am-4pm.

Employment Medway Advice Centre: Provides employment advice on a drop-in basis and on referral by Job Centre Plus. 99-101 High St, Chatham. 01634 336682, Mon to Thu 9am-4.30pm, Fri 9am-4pm (Closed 1-1.30pm every day)

JobCentre Plus: Support for anyone looking for a job The Brook, Chatham. 0800 328 5644 for Universal Credit and 0800 169 0310 for all other benefits, 8am-6pm.

MY Trust (formally Medway Youth Trust): Supporting young people with employment, training and life skills. The Fort, Primrose Close, Chatham ME4 6HZ. 01634 95 9090, 9am-5pm.

MRS Community Hub: Support services for anyone in Crisis. Second Chance Charity Shop offering support to the homeless, voucher system for clothing & furnishings. Also funding for 18-24yr olds for furniture, work clothes & travel. Food vouchers available. 105 High Street, Chatham. 01634 408840.

Medway Men in Sheds: Various activities and support for men who are over 25 and not in employment. Accessed by registration appointments only. Phone 01634 581511 or email: info@sunlighttrust.org.uk

Rough Sleeper Initiative: Helps rough sleepers access a range of services. Leave a message for the outreach team on Roughsleepersteam@medway.gov.uk or 01634 334008. Due to data protection requirements, they may not be able to provide updates on individuals.

Gillingham Street Angels: Shop providing free food, clothing, bedding, laundry service and internet use. 43, Skinner St, Gillingham ME7 1LG. 9am-4pm (also open on Saturday).

StreetlightUK: Free confidential 1-2-1 emotional and practical support for women involved in prostitution. Care packs available on request. Tuesday-Fridays. Phone 07918 035039, email: northk@streetlight.uk.com or visitstreetlight.uk.com

Forward Trust Recovery Service: Opening times Mon: 9am-12:30pm & 5-8pm, Tues, Wed & Friday 9am-5pm, Thur: 9am-8pm. Kingsley House, 37-39 Balmoral Rd, Gillingham ME7 4NT

5.2 Many of the prevention, accommodation and support services listed above recognise the value of partnership working and are members of Medway's Homelessness Forum. The forum meets quarterly to identify shared concerns and best practice on matters including safeguarding adults, supporting clients with multiple disadvantages and will contribute to homelessness strategies published by the council.

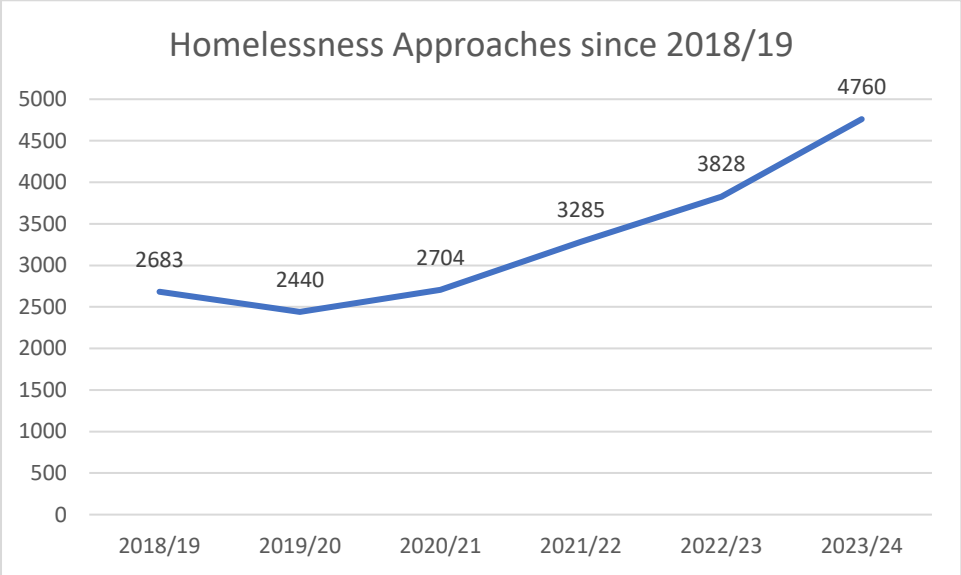
5.3 Many of the community spaces mentioned in the above list such as AMAT Hive, Caring Hands and other community hubs provide a space that enables those experiencing

homelessness to connect with other services including health and housing, provides volunteering opportunities, a way to connect with a wider community and multiple other services.

6. Current and Future levels of homelessness

6.1 This section will discuss the number of people approaching Medway Council who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. It will also examine the diverse groups of people that are approaching and provide insight into the likely future levels of homelessness and the challenges of tackling homelessness in Medway.

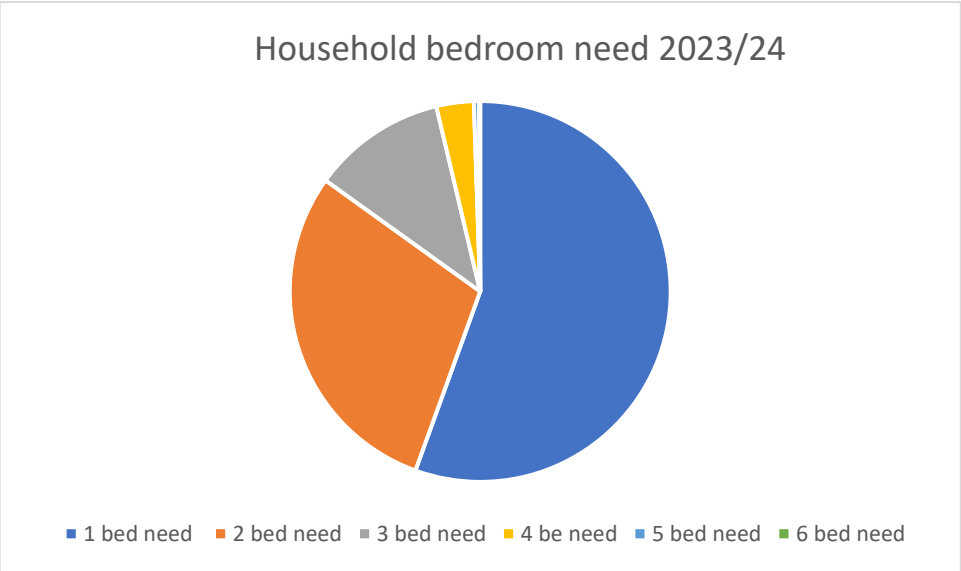
6.1 Since the last homelessness review in 2018 the Council has seen a consistent increase in approaches to the Housing Options team, by households who are seeking assistance with their housing situation. There is a slight decrease in approaches in 2019/20; this is due to a reduction in approaches early 2020 during the start of the COVID19 pandemic.



6.3 In 2023/24, The Housing Options team had 4760 households approach the service to make a homeless application. This is a 77.5% increase of people in Medway seeking assistance from the Council since the last Homeless review in 2018.

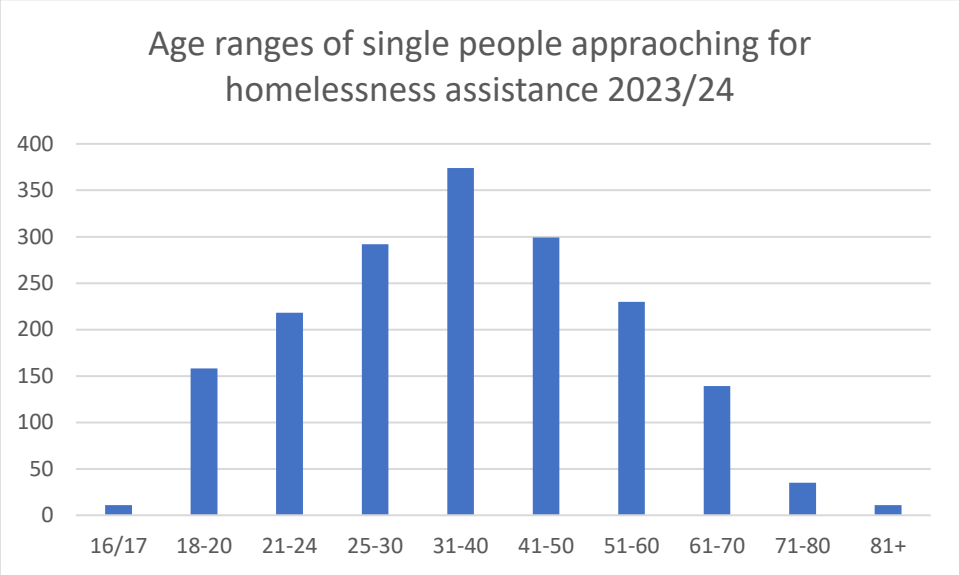
6.4 The size of households approaching the council for homelessness assistance in 2023/24 varies widely, however the highest type of approach is those who only require 1 bedroom. This will be either single people or couples. Those requiring 2 bed properties are the second highest to approach Medway Council for assistance.

6.5



6.6 The age ranges of single people approaching Medway Council for assistance is explored in the below table. This table shows that people are more likely to approach for assistance between the age of 24 and 50 years old. Early research currently being conducted into information held about people rough sleeping during periods of severe weather in Medway indicates that the largest group of people rough sleeping are aged between 30 and 50.

6.7



6.8 The Rough Sleepers Initiative has supported a total of 713 people rough sleeping since 2018 and have assisted a number of these to access emergency accommodation. The below table reflects the ongoing increase of people who are experiencing homelessness and sleeping rough.

6.9

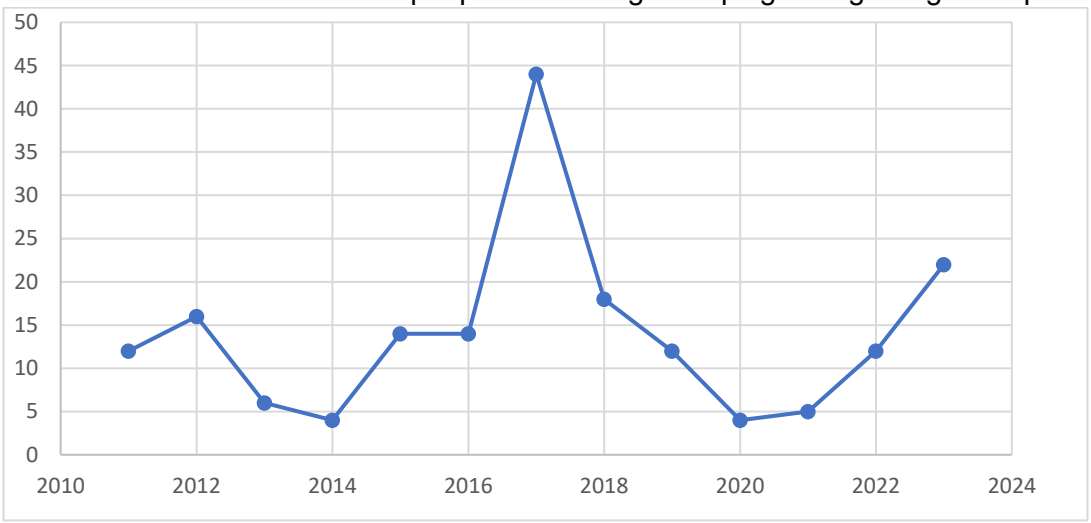
Year	Rough Sleepers engaged with assistance	Rough Sleepers provided with temporary accommodation outside of normal S188 duties
2019	108	52
2020	156	115
2021	93	42
2022	156	32
2023	200	23

Source: Medway Council RSI team April 2024

6.10 The RSI team carry out an independently verified Rough Sleeper Count on one night in November every year, per government guidance. The following data comes from the official counts carried out in November each year. It should be noted that the official counts rely on teams of volunteers going out for four to five hours in the early hours to locations identified via broad service intelligence and trying to find people sleeping rough. The count can only consider those who are bedded down or very likely to be bedded down if an estimate model is used.

6.11 During the first pandemic lockdown all local authorities received the “Everyone In” request. During this exercise Medway Council saw a total of 167 individuals brought into a range of additional provisions commissioned by Medway Council. An example of this is use of a local hotel, who also enabled local support services to access the hotel to provide support to those being accommodated. During this period, the highest number of people accessing the hotel and services at one time was 35.

6.12 This table shows the number of people found rough sleeping during Rough Sleeper Counts.

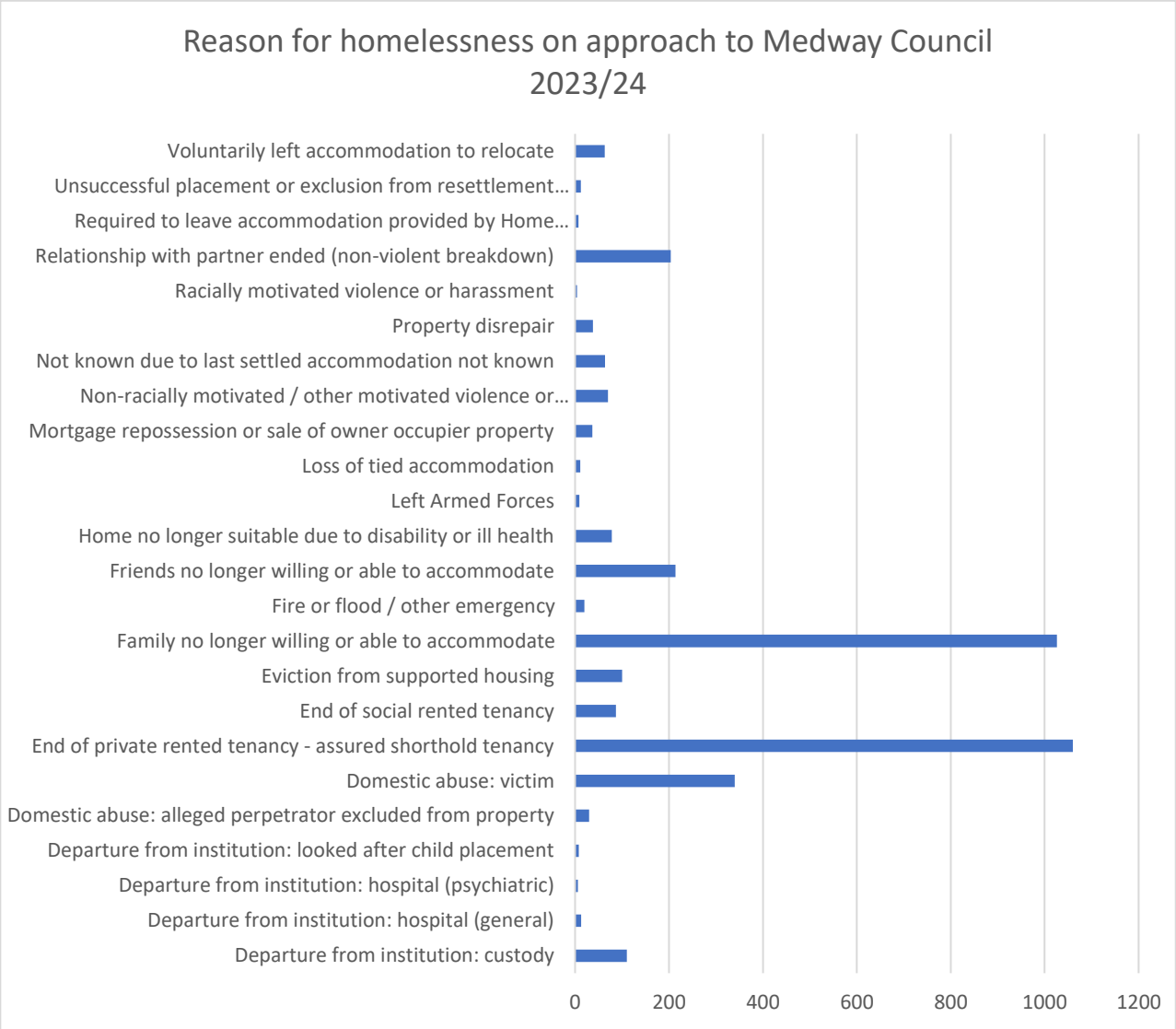


Source: Medway Council RSI team April 2024

6.13 The RSI team support rough sleepers by carrying out a number of interventions, not limited to linking rough sleepers with health services, assisting them to secure private rented accommodation with continued tenancy support after sign up, providing an in-house outreach service to verify and support new rough sleepers in the area. The team also complete advocacy work for the rough sleepers in the area and will develop a plan to help them get off the streets, with follow on support provided to prevent recurrence of sleeping rough.

6.14 As briefly discussed in the introduction of this review, there are a number of reasons why a household may become homeless. To see a full breakdown of why people have approached Medway Council for assistance with homelessness, central government publish this data quarterly and annually[16]. In Medway, the most common reasons for being made homeless are being asked to leave by friends or family members or being evicted by private landlords.

6.15


Reason for homelessness on approach to Medway Council 2023/24
Voluntarily left accommodation to relocate
Unsuccessful placement or exclusion from resettlement...
Required to leave accommodation provided by Home...
Relationship with partner ended (non-violent breakdown)
Racially motivated violence or harassment
Property disrepair
Not known due to last settled accommodation not known
Non-racially motivated / other motivated violence or...
Mortgage repossession or sale of owner occupier property
Loss of tied accommodation
Left Armed Forces
Home no longer suitable due to disability or ill health
Friends no longer willing or able to accommodate
Fire or flood / other emergency
Family no longer willing or able to accommodate
Eviction from supported housing
End of social rented tenancy
End of private rented tenancy - assured shorthold tenancy
Domestic abuse: victim
Domestic abuse: alleged perpetrator excluded from property
Departure from institution: looked after child placement
Departure from institution: hospital (psychiatric)
Departure from institution: hospital (general)
Departure from institution: custody
0
200
400
600
800
1000
1200

6.16 We have seen a change since the pandemic and cost of living crisis in the reason why private landlords are evicting. Previously, it was more common to see landlords evicting due to rent arrears or as they are increasing the rent and are seeking new tenants. In recent months, the more likely reason for eviction from the private sector is Landlords wanting to sell their property. This has resulted in fewer prevention options as the Council's ability to negotiate a tenant remaining in their property is reduced, and there are a smaller number of properties available to help move applicants into. The below table demonstrates the reasons people lost their privately rented accommodation in 2023/24.

[16] https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/homelessness-statistics#statutory-homelessness

6.17

6.18 The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 placed a duty on other public bodies such as GPs, the DWP, prisons, probation services, and hospitals to complete a referral to the local authority if they are working with someone who is homeless or at risk of homelessness. This is called the Duty to Refer (DTR). This has played a part in increasing the number of approaches to Medway Council since 2018, however this new duty has simplified access into the Housing Options team for other public bodies and has encouraged closer joint working with other services.

6.19 The number of people approaching for assistance as they are fleeing domestic abuse has seen an increase over the last 5 years. In 2021, Medway Council employed a Housing Options Domestic Abuse officer (HODA) to work within the Housing Options team, to ensure those fleeing domestic abuse are supported holistically throughout the homelessness application process. The HODA works closely with local Independent Domestic Violence Advocate (IDVA) services, attends Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) meetings, and provides advocacy and advice to the customer in relation to their housing situation, with the aim to support people into safe and secure accommodation. Along with the increase in general approaches to the housing options team, we are expecting to see a proportional continued increase in approaches by those who are fleeing domestic abuse. In 2023/24, the housing options team have been approached by approximately 290 people who are fleeing domestic abuse. This is almost double the total number of approaches due to fleeing domestic abuse made in 2022/23.

6.20 It is considered that those who are being released from prison without a fixed abode are more likely to be at risk of sleeping rough and re-offending than the general population. In July 2021, the Ministry of Justice begun funding accommodation called CAS3[17]. This is temporary accommodation, lasting up to 84 days for those who are going to be released from prison with nowhere else to live, and who are not owed any interim accommodation duties by the local authority.

6.21 It is expected that whilst the person is in CAS3, that they are supported to work with the Local Authority and other services to access permanent accommodation. Medway Council work closely with the local prisons to attempt to complete homelessness applications prior

[17] https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/62ac90a1d3bf7f0af5de3927/cas3-national-roll-out-programme-ao-assessment-memo.pdf

to release dates and attend a pre-release panel to better understand who is being released and what assistance can be provided to both services and individuals. In 2023/24, the council have been approached by 110 people who have been homeless on release from prison.

6.22 Further research is currently being carried out by Medway Council's Practice Improvement and Co-occurring Conditions Coordinator (PICCC) into barriers faced by people who sleep rough, who have been released from prison and use substances. Initial findings suggest that people released from prison will have multiple appointments to attend all on day one of release. This may include LA Housing Services, Probation (if they are on licence,) Chatham Job Centre and Forward Trust. This can be overwhelming and challenging to navigate especially if the probation office is in another area other than Medway. This means someone may not approach Housing Options to make a homeless application until much later, after they have been sofa surfing or have been rough sleeping. This indicates that the numbers of people who are homeless immediately on release from prison recorded by the Council may not be a true reflection of the need within Medway, as if they approach after sofa surfing or rough sleeping the Council is more likely to record this, rather than that they were homeless on release from prison. Local prisons have recently moved away from releasing those who have completed their prison sentences on a Friday, to better enable people to access all the services they need to upon release.

6.23 Youth homelessness can have long lasting effects on those who experience it. Centre Point have said that "*experiencing such instability at a crucial and evolving time in their lives can have repercussions for years to come*."[18] On average, Medway Council is approached by around 20 16–17-year-olds and around 350 18-25 years olds per year who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. Whilst this does not make up the bulk of homelessness approaches, Medway Council recognises the importance of working toward the prevention of youth homelessness, and have processes in place to assist in this, as well as dedicated commissioned supported accommodation for those who are homeless and between the ages of 16 and 25.

6.24 Specific provision is in place for those who are homeless or at risk of homeless and are between the ages of 16 -17 years old. Legislation requires the council to complete a Joint Housing Assessment[19] with Children's Services to assess what duties are owed by the Council. This includes duties owed by both Housing Services and Children's Services. Whilst a person who is 16 or 17 years old will have an automatic priority need for emergency accommodation, it is considered best practice that all other options should be considered before placing a 16- or 17-year-old into emergency or temporary accommodation. To ensure the duties and options are explained clearly and neutrally, Medway Council works closely with the Young Lives Foundation[20], and a JHA is not carried out unless the young person has an advocate from YLF present at the assessment.

6.25 The YLF publish a quarterly and annual report on their advocacy work with Medway Council, which often features their statistics of youth homelessness and case studies of

[18] https://centrepoint.org.uk/ending-youth-homelessness/what-youth-homelessness/impact-youth-homelessness?gclid=CjwKCAiA7t6sBhAiEiwAsaieYvFck1RHNYiGTbGepN59dWf7RtFiOuynFNVN6KY73wrnRiXiQ0Ku8xoCAP8QAvD_BwE&gclsrc=aw.ds

[19] https://www.medway.gov.uk/info/200608/youth_homelessness/1595/housing_support/3

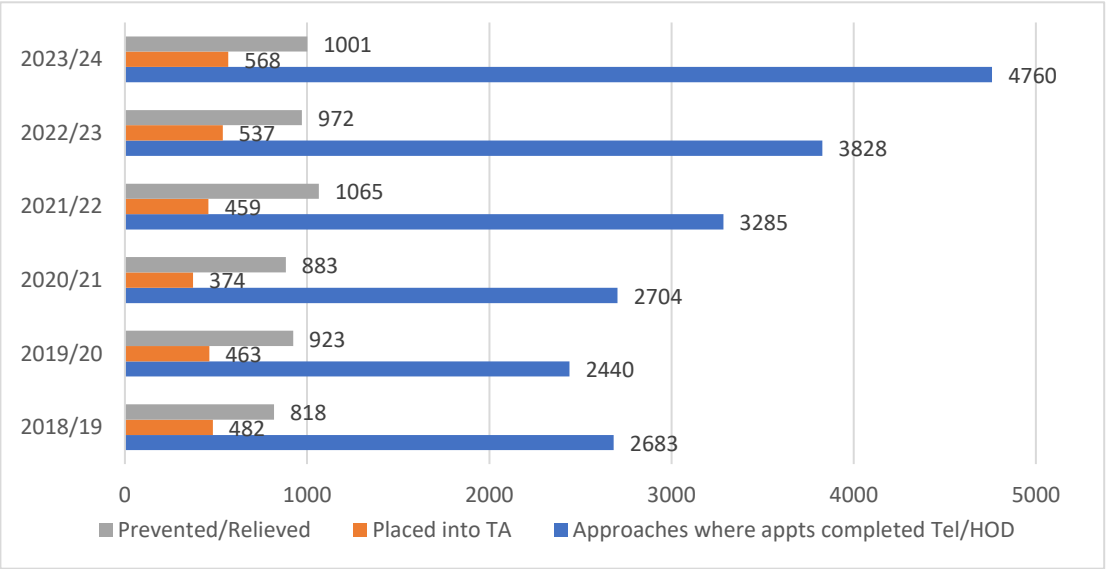
[20] https://ylf.org.uk/how-we-help/advocacy-childrens-rights/

young people who are at risk of homelessness, and the work carried out with Medway Council.[21]

6.26 Care leavers under the age of 21 are also in automatic priority need if they become homeless. However, the Housing Options team and Leaving Care (LC) team work closely together to reduce the number of Medway Care leavers who need to make a homelessness application. The Housing Options team attend move on planning meetings, Children's services finance panel and have a strong working relationship with the LC team. The LC team have recruited a Housing specialist, who works closely with the Housing Options team to assist care leavers to navigate the homelessness application process and potentially avoid homelessness altogether.

6.27 A further factor in the future levels of homelessness to consider, are government schemes for those fleeing war. Whilst not all families or people who are fleeing to the UK are making homelessness applications immediately on entry to the UK, there is the future potential that resettlement schemes managed by central government (such as Homes for Ukraine) will end and these families/people will require assistance from the Local Authority in the form of a homelessness application. Medway Council has a dedicated team to support refugees who are in the area, which includes the prevention of their homelessness prior to any homelessness duties being owed. In Medway there were approximately 100 families in sponsored placements under the Homes for Ukraine Scheme in 2023/24.

6.28 In line with legislative guidance and the Council plan, the Housing Options Team places a larger focus on prevention work. Prevention work includes activities such as (but not limited to) working with households to reduce their rent arrears to remain in their current home, securing accommodation in the private sector, referring into supported accommodation and negotiating with friends and family to enable someone to remain living at home. A demonstration of the levels of prevention work carried out by the Housing Options team can be seen in the tables below. The first compares the number of approaches dealt with by Housing Options, how many are successfully prevented or relieved and how many are placed into temporary accommodation. The second table highlights how homelessness was prevented or relieved, with a savings estimate when compared to a placement in temporary accommodation if the prevention or relief work was unsuccessful.



[21] https://ylf.org.uk/wp/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Medway-Annual-Advocacy-Report-22-23.pdf

Year	**Number of households accepted Prevention/Relief Duty**	Households Prevented/ Relieved into Private accommodation	Households Prevented/ Relieved into Part 6 (social housing) accommodation	Households Prevented/ Relieved via Housing Options Assistance Other (e.g., remained in existing)	**Total Priority Need Households Prevented/ Relieved**	Total Number of Households Placed in TA	Estimated TA Cost Saving Achieved via Successful Prevention/Relief
2019/20	1676	400	36	468	527	496	£5,115,346.58
2020/21	1575	431	64	378	460	371	£4,465,008.40
2021/22	1716	377	113	573	577	425	£5,600,673.58
2022/23	1677	307	128	534	525	542	£5,095,933.50

6.29 The tables above demonstrate that anyone who is eligible and homeless or at risk of homelessness is supported to prevent homelessness in line with the Homelessness Reduction Act. Where homelessness cannot be prevented, they are supported to relief homelessness, with TA provided if they are in priority need. TA will continue to be provided if a full housing duty is owed until permanent housing is found. All those not owed a further duty are provided with advice and assistance to help them find alternative accommodation.

6.30 Throughout the UK, Local Authorities are struggling to secure access to sufficient temporary accommodation, and Medway is no different. Post pandemic, the number of available properties has reduced, and this is continuing still. As mentioned above, many private sector landlords are leaving the market due to an increase in the cost of mortgages. Alongside this, many landlords are increasingly selective about who they want as tenants, which puts additional pressure onto Medway Council's Rehousing Team when attempting to procure accommodation for homeless households.

6.31 An additional barrier in sourcing properties to use as temporary accommodation is the pressure from other Local Authorities using Medway as a cheaper location than their own. When LAs place someone in temporary accommodation in another borough, they are required to issue a S208 notification to the receiving borough. Placements from other boroughs into the area dilute the availability of properties for Medway Council. Landlords report that other boroughs are offering to pay more for the placements than Medway. The below table examines the number of S208 notifications Medway has received from other authorities.

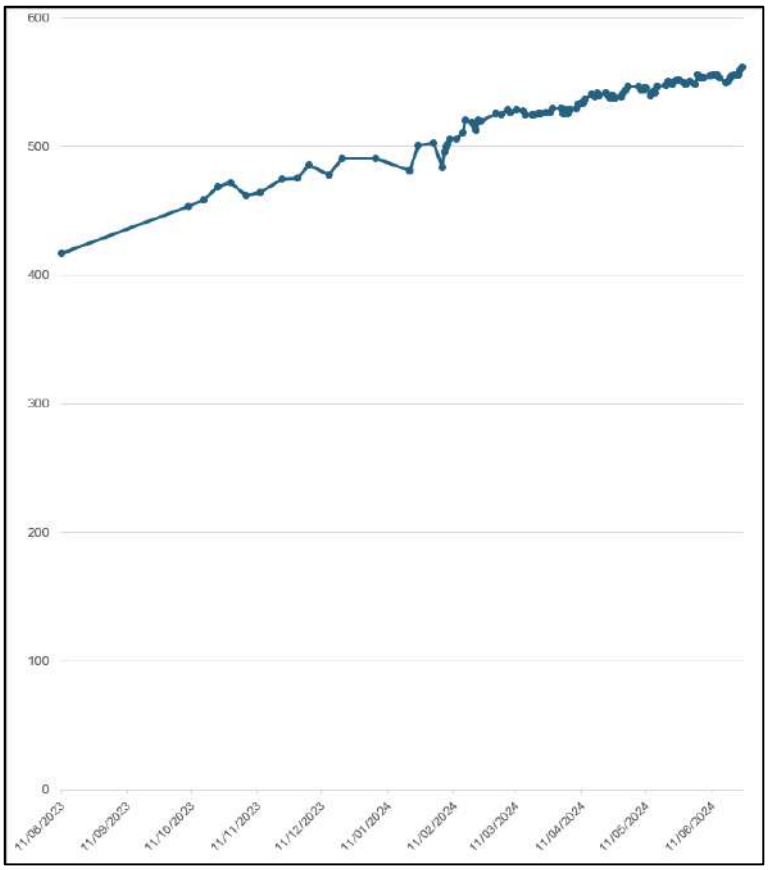
6.32

Year	Kent Boroughs	London Boroughs	Other Boroughs	Total Notifications of placements
2018/19	88	131	17	236
2019/20	151	147	19	317
2020/21	482	92	15	589
2021/22	649	94	3	746
2022/23	704	125	8	837
2023/24	266	202	6	474

6.33 Medway Council recognises the disruption moving out of area can cause to families, as well as the additional burden it adds to local services. Medway Council Rehousing team generally do not place homeless households out of area unless there is a genuine cause for concern of the households' safety by remaining in the local area, or there is no other suitable accommodation available in Medway.

6.34 Due to the increasing number of households approaching the Council for assistance to avoid homelessness and the insufficient availability of homes resident can afford, the number of people accommodated by Medway Council in Temporary Accommodation has increased. The below table demonstrates the increase of placements over the past year, and the frequency of which placements have multiplied.

6.35



6.36 Of the people currently placed in temporary accommodation, the average length of time spent in TA is 317 nights. The Council currently use a mixture of council owned stock and private landlords for temporary accommodation. At the time of writing this report, Medway

Council do not have any placements in B&B style accommodation.

6.37 To reduce spend on temporary accommodation, Medway Council has plans to purchase 150 properties to be used specifically for Temporary Accommodation, as well as utilising a target of 100 properties from the Council's social housing stock.

6.38 The Housing Options team and Rehousing Team both report that within the past 5 years, the level of complexity within each homelessness application has increased. Households require more support than before, and often with more than one type of need. Homelessness is not a stand-alone issue, and as discussed at the beginning of this report, is caused by a number of intertwining factors. This can cause barriers in finding suitable alternative accommodation for those who become homeless. Private landlords are reluctant to accept a household with a history of rent arrears (regardless of the reason behind them), or those who may potentially cause issues in their tenancy due to previous ASB or the complexity of their support needs.

6.39 As demonstrated in the tables presented in 6.28, the number of people assisted into social housing is significantly lower than those moving into alternative private rented accommodation or remaining in their usual home. This is due to the lack of availability of social housing in comparison to the number of people who need assistance. The below table shows the number of people who applied to the social housing register in the past 5 years.

6.40

2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
3087	3228	3968	3951	5142

6.41 Another significant barrier to assisting people move on from temporary accommodation is an increase in the size of households in the Medway area. Families are generally growing, however the availability of properties large enough is not, and those that are big enough and in the private sector are well out of reach in terms of affordability.

7 Summary of challenges

7.1 The following challenges are present within the private rented sector:

- Disparity in LHA rate and market rent
- Increase in referrals to the Private Sector Housing team, indicating worsening condition of property in the sector.
- Availability of affordable, private rented property.

7.2 Overall increase in people seeking housing help from Medway Council, both on the social housing register, those making homeless applications and those sleeping rough.

7.3 The cost to the council of temporary accommodation has increased, due to the number of people who require temporary accommodation as well as the increase in cost of temporary accommodation.

7.4 Whilst there is clearly strong partnership working carried out across the housing services in Medway, there are still some challenges ensuring that everyone that needs help, can access

available services.

7.5 Move on options for homeless households, or for those in supported accommodation are reduced, due to the unavailability of private rented accommodation and social housing.

7.6 Options of accommodation for those with complex needs and backgrounds are limited.

8 Financial Resources for tackling homelessness in Medway.

8.1 **Rough Sleeping Initiative** - Funding is provided by DLUHC to fund, commission and directly provide specific activities in Medway for people who are rough sleeping in the Medway area.

8.2 **Homelessness Prevention Fund** - This funding ensures local authorities can meet their duties under the Homelessness Prevention Act, including preventing homelessness and accommodating homeless applicants. There is additional funding for those who have fled war and require assistance integrating into the community and maintaining tenancies.

8.3 **Discretionary Housing Payment** – The funding available, managed by Medway Council's internal Housing Benefit team that can be used to support Medway residents to maintain their current tenancies.

8.4 **Disabled Facilities Grant** – Funding available for Medway residents to apply to cover costs towards the cost of eligible works necessary to support people of all ages and tenures to live independently and safely in their own homes.

8.5 **Housing Related Support** - This funding is built into the main housing budget and is used to commission 5 supported housing schemes.

8.6 **Domestic Abuse –** Funding is provided by DLUHC to ensure that Local Authorities can meet their duties under the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, in terms of commissioning support in safe and relevant accommodation to households subject to Domestic Abuse.

8.7 **Supported Housing Improvement Programme** – Funding provided by DLUHC to improve supported housing schemes in the local area. This will assist in reducing the amount of people who are made homeless, as well as providing better options for those who are homeless and need additional support.

9 Delivering accommodation options

9.1 Medway Council has a number of options available to assist those who are homeless, to either secure alternative accommodation or to support them in remaining in their current property.

9.2 The Private Rented Scheme (PRS) is available to those who are owed a homelessness duty. The PRS means The Council and can provide rent in advance and deposit for households who need financial assistance to secure a property in the private sector. The PRS team spend a significant amount of time liaising with Landlords, inspecting properties to ensure there are no hazards prior to the sign up, and assisting tenants to secure viewings at properties. They also provide advice on maintaining tenancies, ensuring that tenants are given correct and legal paperwork upon their sign up and will liaise with

landlords in the future if there are issues with rent arrears.

9.3 Despite there being a dedicated team to assist homeless people into the private sector, the team face the same barriers mentioned above as the Rehousing Team. As highlighted in section 4.7, the increase in rent in the area and disparity between rent costs and LHA rates has reduced the amount of property available for the team to use. Medway Council must also compete with other Local Authorities in Kent and London, as many also have a similar financial assistance scheme, but are able to offer a better up-front package for landlords. Some London Boroughs offer 6 months' rent upfront to secure a tenancy.

9.4 For Rough Sleepers who aren't owed any emergency accommodation duties, The RSI team also commission Medway Assessment Centre (MAC) which provides short term emergency bed spaces for those who are rough sleeping and in crisis, aiming to support them to access other services and accommodation in either supported housing or the private sector. There is 24 hour support on site. They have supported a total of 136 residents with an average stay of 4.7 weeks. Only 12 residents have stayed in MAC more than once, with 4 staying more than twice.

9.5 RSI also commission support to 10 Households in Housing First flats, 11 rooms of higher intensity support in existing schemes and provide some accommodation within local B&Bs whilst longer term options are sought.

9.6 Medway Council does have its own housing stock. This stock, along with other social housing stock is allocated via the Housing Register. Medway Council's Allocations Policy[22] sets out who can bid for social housing stock and who is given priority on the register in Medway.

9.7 Not everyone on the housing register is homeless or at risk of homelessness. As demonstrated in the table in 6.28, the number of properties that have been used to resolve someone's homelessness is significantly lower than other prevention methods. This is due to a lack of supply of social housing.

9.8 There are approximately 2500 applicants on the Council's Choice based Lettings system Homechoice. These applicants can bid on available properties from both Medway Council stock and the stock of other Housing Associations in the area.

9.9 Below is a table that examines the number of successful lets of social housing per year. This is the total number of properties let out on the housing register, not just to homeless households.

9.10

Year	Properties Let
2018	891
2019	701
2020	751
2021	1011
2022	840
2023	653

9.11 The pandemic caused a delay in letting properties out, which is the suggested reason for a spike in successful lets in 2021. This data demonstrates the lack of social housing in

[22] https://www.medway.gov.uk/downloads/file/1509/strategic_housing_allocations_policy

comparison to the levels of homeless households in the Medway area. If social housing was reserved only for those who are owed a homeless duty (see table in 4.22), there would still not be enough supply to accommodate everyone who is owed a homeless duty by the council in social housing.

9.12 Medway Council commissions five Supported Housing providers for those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. The schemes are intended to support people who have additional needs and prepare them for living independently in the future. Two schemes are specifically for ex-offenders, two schemes accommodate 16 – 25 years olds, and two are for general needs homelessness. As mentioned above, one of our commissioned providers has additional funding from the RSI fund, to provide a housing first model for those who have experienced rough sleeping and additional support is provided to a number of the other units. The schemes provide valuable support to some of Medway's more vulnerable residents, enabling them to learn to live independently and manage a range of additional needs they may have.

9.13 Medway's RSI funding also contributed to a hostel run by a local charity; however, this is now moving to a Housing Benefit model. The hostel aims to provide support and accommodation for rough sleepers for approximately 12 weeks, with the plan to move them into alternative supported accommodation, or permanent accommodation.

9.14 Outside of the commissioned services, Medway has a few privately run supported accommodation provisions that are aimed at supporting those who are experiencing homelessness. Medway has more provision of supported housing for those experiencing homelessness than neighbouring boroughs in Kent.

9.15 Medway council has commissioned Homeless Link to complete a supported housing needs assessment, which will analyse the current gaps in services, those accessing current provision and the routes of move on into permanent accommodation.

9.16 For those fleeing domestic abuse, Medway commissions two local refuges however due to the risks to other residents in the refuge, Medway Residents are not always able to access the service. Since December 2021, and in line with the Domestic Abuse Act, Medway Council has commissioned a dispersed accommodation scheme for those who are fleeing domestic abuse, that enables them to remain in the area. The Safe in Medway (SIM) project is delivered in partnership with Oasis and provides an alternative solution to temporary accommodation in area, which includes intensive support from qualified IDVAs. The team work closely with Medway Council Housing services and local Housing Associations to move residents into safe, permanent accommodation.

9.17 Where appropriate, the Council will look to help people remain in their current accommodation, rather than helping them to move on to a new property. This prevention work includes providing mediation with family members or landlords. It can also include assisting those at risk of homelessness to reduce their rent arrears or produce payment plans with landlords. This work is carried out across both the private sector and local housing associations.

9.18 The Housing services within Medway council work closely with the Housing Benefit team to make good use of the Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) fund, to encourage tenancy sustainment. They are not long-term payments and are awarded on a short-term basis while residents take action to improve their circumstances. There is a specific criterion regarding what DHP will be paid for.

	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Total number of DHP claims	696	514	630	454	389	327
Total spend	£701,971.23	£630,634.42	£827,032.90	£664,649.29	£484,629.19	£485,536.71

9.19 In cases where a person requires ongoing, additional support to maintain their tenancy, Medway Council has a floating support service for local residents. In the past 10 years this contract has been commissioned to external partners, however more recently this has moved inhouse and is now managed by the Welfare and Benefits team. Floating support can help with exercises such as maximising income, ensuring residents are accessing the correct support providers and some advocacy.

9.20 In some situations, someone may need adaptations made to their home to remain living in the property. The Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG)[23] is a mandatory grant, provided under the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996, towards the cost of eligible works necessary to support people of all ages and tenures to live independently and safely in their own homes. Local authorities have a statutory duty and powers to provide DFGs to applicants who qualify. The below table examines the usage of the DFG by Medway Council in the past 5 years.

9.21

Financial Year	2018/19	2019/2020	2020/2021	2021/2022	2022/2023
Number of Enquiries	197	220	195	254	245
Number of grants approved	141	139	107	162	156
Total committed for year	£1,263,670.38	£1,552,489.19	£1,181,813.54	£1,665,460.01	£1,633,814.52

10. Next Steps and Recommendations

10.1 This review will provide the factual basis for the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy which we will draft in 2024 and publish in early 2025. We will continue to engage with partners to fully understand homelessness within Medway and ways to address it.

23 https://www.medway.gov.uk/download/downloads/id/7782/disabled_facilities_grant_and_financial_assistance_policy_draft.docx

10.2 In completing this review, it is clear that there are multiple dedicated and enthusiastic services within Medway Council and within the wider voluntary and private sector, who are dedicated to resolving issues of homelessness for Medway Residents. Many services have voiced that what is lacking, is the availability of affordable and suitable accommodation for homeless households to move into, as well as getting the right kind of support in place for these households.

10.3 The following recommendations should be taken into consideration when drafting the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy:

10.4 To continue working with partner organisations to evolve and improve services provided by the council. This should include ensuring that the council remain active within Medway's Homelessness Forum and subsequent task and finish groups.

10.5 The Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Strategy should enable services to meet the commitments made via the work completed with Arts and Homelessness International.

10.6 The Council should undertake a better analysis of the data we hold of past and current homeless applicants. This will help us to understand needs of those experiencing homelessness in the area to inform service development.

10.7 Continue to foster internal knowledge and partnership working within the whole of Housing Services within the Council, and other internal teams such as Public Health and Social Care.

10.8 In line with the council plan and legislative guidance, an emphasis on the prevention of homelessness and the council's ability to perform this function should be made within the Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping strategy.

10.9 The Council should continue to explore ways to provide temporary accommodation in the most cost-effective way, as well as assessing their financial offer to support homeless households into the private sector. The council is already exploring purchasing properties to use as temporary accommodation, and a leasehold scheme.

10.10 Continue exploring ways to maximise the usage of the council's own housing stock for those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

10.11 Improving the quality of accommodation in Medway will reduce the risk of homelessness of people who need to move due to significant disrepair or non-suitability of their property. This should encompass the private sector, social sector, and supported accommodation.

10.12 Consider any actions that could be taken to address empty homes in the Medway area, that could provide an additional supply of property to those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. Previously Medway Council employed an empty homes officer, and this post will again be going out to recruitment.

10.13 A Supported Housing Needs assessment has been completed in May 2024. The outcomes of this report should inform the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy.

10.14 Continue working toward DAHA accreditation, to ensure those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness due to fleeing Domestic Abuse, receive the best possible service from Medway Council.